



University journals in the global academic publishing landscape: Mapping over 19,000 diverse titles based on Ulrichsweb data

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Abstract

Universities have been an instrumental part of the scholarly publishing landscape dating back several centuries, but comprehensive mapping of the presence of universities' involvement in publishing of journals is lacking. Using Ulrichsweb as the primary source and complementing it with data from Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ and OpenAlex, we compiled a dataset of 19,414 active, peer-reviewed university journals from 148 countries using a multilingual identification method. The results reveal significant disparities in coverage: nearly three-quarters of the journals are indexed in OpenAlex, almost half in DOAJ, fewer than a quarter in Scopus, and fewer than a fifth on the Web of Science Core Collection. From a global perspective, university journals are heavily clustered to a few countries, notably the United States, Indonesia and Brazil. University journals are characterized by strong linguistic diversity, with more than a third publishing exclusively in non-English languages. The social sciences and humanities dominate the disciplinary profile. This study establishes a baseline for further research into bibliodiversity, equity and the role of universities in scholarly communication.

Keywords University journals · Bibliometric analysis · Indexing databases · Scholarly communication · Journal publishing

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Introduction

University journals (UJs), journals explicitly affiliated with higher education institutions (HEIs) or their departments, represent a distinctive and under-explored layer of the scholarly publishing ecosystem despite having been around for a long time. While learned societies created and operated the first scholarly journals in the seventeenth century (Fyfe et al., 2017), the rise of research universities inspired by the Humboldtian model in the nineteenth century – first in Germany and later adopted globally – led to the emergence of journals published by university presses. Some of the world’s oldest academic publishers, Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press, have existed since the sixteenth century but primarily focused on book publishing until the late nineteenth century. Since the early days and with the move into the era of digital, often open access (OA) publishing (Crawford, 2025), UJs have become a sprawling segment of the modern journal publishing landscape. However, despite long-standing knowledge that UJs make up a substantial share of all scholarly journals (Morrison, 2016; Rosenbaum, 2017; Taşkın et al., 2025b), there has been relatively little research attention aimed directly at UJs.

In the current scholarly communication landscape, UJs are published by a variety of entities and units within HEIs, such as university presses, libraries (Furlough, 2008; Sisättö et al., 2012), academic departments, schools, etc. The fact that publishing activities happen at different levels of the organization is one reason for why properly identifying and studying UJs has been challenging, since the bibliometric publisher information is often not harmonized and connected to the top-level of the organization. Universities themselves might also not be aware of what is happening within their walls since the activities can be decentralized and decoupled (see e.g. Moore & Wigdorowitz, 2025). The more thorough look at previous research later in this paper reveals that bibliometric studies have had very little methodological harmonization into what publisher type classifications to implement, a step which is usually done manually and with varying categories and criteria, which means that numbers and research on UJs varies a lot from study to study making any kind of cumulative knowledge building or longitudinal studies based on previous studies very hard to realize. This lack of harmonization is compounded by the structural biases of selective databases, which disproportionately privilege commercial publishers and English-language journals, thereby obscuring much of the diversity in scholarly publishing (Cruz Romero et al., 2025; Van Bellen et al., 2025).

Outside of a small number of large university presses that function on the volume and business logics of international for-profit publishers, the vast majority of UJs commonly operate with limited resources, on a non-profit basis, and with the mission to support disciplinary communities, foster regionally grounded scholarship, and democratize knowledge production – particularly in underrepresented linguistic, geographic, or disciplinary contexts (Khanna et al., 2022; Laakso & Multas, 2023; Nazarovets, 2025a).

Although the majority of UJs operate as small, mission-driven outlets, the segment is not uniformly peripheral. For instance, UJs are present in the higher categories of various international and national journal evaluation systems, such as the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) and the ABDC Journal Quality List used in business and economics, the Norwegian Register for Scientific Journals, Series and Publishers, the Finnish JUFO Classification, and Qualis in Brazil. This indicates that universities as publishers can support publications at all levels of quality.

UJs can function as core instruments of knowledge dissemination and as symbolic capital, or “currency of prestige”, for universities (Repiso, 2019; Risam, 2024). UJs

frequently act as representations of a university's academic brand. The capacity to sustain journals that are indexed in international databases is progressively regarded as an indicator of institutional quality and competitiveness in global rankings (Repiso et al., 2019).

The growing interest in non-commercial models of publishing, with a trend towards joint funding and community-based management of scholarly communication, such as Diamond OA, has opened up new opportunities that are in line with the mission of UJs (Armengou et al., 2023; Bosman et al., 2021).

Despite their contributions to national research infrastructures and their alignment with the principles of bibliodiversity and structural equity, UJs remain largely overlooked in global research assessment systems and bibliographic databases (Khanna et al., 2022; Laakso & Pölönen, 2023). This dynamic is reinforced by evaluation cultures in some fields that privilege extremely narrow journal hierarchies, such as the “top five” phenomenon documented by Heckman and Moktan (2020) in economics. UJs marginalization is rooted in a complex interplay of structural and infrastructural challenges. These include the uneven degree of institutional support and formal integration into national research systems (Grötschel, 2017; Nazarovets, 2024); low visibility in selective global indexing platforms (Nazarovets, 2024; Repiso et al., 2019); and inconsistent metadata quality, which hinders large-scale identification, analysis, and comparison of UJs (Nazarovets, 2025b; Nishikawa-Pacher, 2022). Moreover, concerns regarding editorial inbreeding and endogamy persist (Tutuncu, 2024), even as many UJs maintain long-standing peer review traditions through their university presses (Rosenbaum, 2017). Their sustainability is further constrained by limited access to stable, long-term funding models (Laakso & Multas, 2023). This marginalization is partly rooted in historical changes in academic publishing after 1945, when there was a significant shift in control over publishing systems from academic institutions to commercial structures. This undermined the autonomy of university publications and entrenched commercial models as the standard for quality and visibility (Fyfe et al., 2017).

Recent developments present both opportunities and persistent gaps. On the one hand, the proliferation of Diamond OA publishing initiatives, the rise of library publishing programs (Roh, 2014), and the emergence of open journal metadata infrastructures (e.g., OpenAlex, Crossref) have created new opportunities for re-evaluating the role of UJs. On the other hand, the global distribution of UJs remains under-explored and under-theorized. The extant literature on the subject has historically centered on individual countries, regional systems (e.g., Latin America, Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa), or specific functional aspects such as editorial governance, peer review, or financing models (Domínguez & Marti-Lahera, 2023; Stojanovski & Mofardin, 2023; Nazarovets, 2024). Consequently, there is a paucity of comprehensive, cross-platform understanding of how UJs are distributed, indexed, and represented within global scholarly infrastructures.

This study responds to this gap by implementing an inclusive mapping of UJs aggregating data from Ulrichsweb Global Serials Directory (Ulrichsweb), OpenAlex, the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Scopus, and Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection. The goal is to produce a metadata-driven analysis of the global UJ landscape, focusing especially on the following questions:

How many active university journals are there in the world? When did they start publishing? How comprehensively are these journals included in various bibliometric indexes? How are they distributed across countries, disciplines, and across publication languages? What share of the journals are currently publishing OA? These data also offer a basis for evaluating whether the existing scale, distribution, and organizational

configurations of university-based journals are sufficient to support any realistic shift away from commercial publishing models.

Previous research

The existing research concerning UJs consists mainly of two threads, (1) bibliometric studies utilizing various data sources that have included identification of UJs as part of the study, and (2) non-bibliometric research that concerns organizational and operational circumstances for journals of this type. Since this study focuses firmly on contributing towards the former, we direct interested readers of non-bibliometric research to Nazarovets (2025a) that presents a recent literature review comprising 105 publications that related to the concept of UJs. The review analyses research publications from 1995 to 2024 and examines key aspects such as funding models, editorial practices, and the technological infrastructure of UJs worldwide. Among the main challenges identified are the limited international visibility of journals, often due to language barriers and insufficient indexing in global databases, financial instability, significant dependence on university budgets, and problems related to a lack of professional editorial staff.

In bibliometric mappings of UJs, the selection of the population (the journal indexing service) and the inclusion criteria (how are UJs defined and detected) are key attributes that influence the outcome of each study. No bibliometric journal indexing service is fully comprehensive, each providing a different global representation of scholarly publishing, and no indexing services provide direct tagging and filtering to UJs specifically so it is up to the methodology choices made by individual researchers how studies have designed around these factors. Understanding the impacts of these choices, especially in the context of underrepresented publishing models such as UJs, is important for interpreting the contributions of each study.

Repiso et al. (2019) used the WoS Master Journal List, Ulrichsweb, and journal websites to identify 1,492 university-published journals. They found that only 11.6% of WoS-indexed journals are from universities, mostly concentrated in top institutions like Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press, with the strongest presence in humanities and social sciences.

Kulczycki et al. (2025) conducted a study on journals published in seven countries across Europe and Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Finland, Mexico, Poland, and Türkiye. The study utilized ISSN Center data in combination with national sources in order to get an as comprehensive population as possible, building a dataset of 15,053 journals, and then comparing the result with which of these journals were included in WoS, Scopus, and OpenAlex. Educational institutions were found to be the most common publisher organization type in several countries, publishing over 75% of journals in Colombia and Brazil and over 50% in Mexico, Argentina and Poland. The only relatively low share of publishers of this type was Finland with 19%, where rather scholarly societies dominate the national publishing environment. OpenAlex was found to cover over 50% of the journals in most of the studied countries, while WoS and Scopus only contained 8.5% and 10.2% respectively. Overall notable is that 94.5% of all journals included in the study were published by publishers that publish only one journal.

University journals among open access journals

The presence of UJs has been researched particularly in the context of research on OA journals, where UJs have often had strong representation. Solomon (2013) conducted a publisher type study on the 1948 active OA journals listed in the DOAJ that were included in the Scopus bibliometric database in 2011, relying on manual classification of publishers based on the information found in Scopus or on the websites of the journals. The study found that university-published journals made up 24% (460) of the titles and 14% of the article volume (21,279) of all Scopus-included OA journals published in 2010. Only 15% of the UJs charged an APC, which was the second-lowest share, only after government published journals. Distinct for UJs were also their strong representation in the social sciences and arts and humanities, having a dominantly higher share than any publisher type in these.

Crawford (2025) recently conducted a study on the entire DOAJ, where publisher type was one of the central attributes. Publisher categorization was conducted manually by the author. Of all the 20,109 active OA journals that were included in the directory at the start of 2025, 61% (12,270) were published by a university, college or institute. These journals had the highest share of no-APC titles of any publisher type, at 80% of all journals in the category. The vast majority of the journals in this category, 8,017 (65%) belonged to the Humanities and Social Sciences. The top countries with the most journals by this publisher category were Indonesia, Brazil, Spain, and Poland.

In a study researching of once active OA journals that have vanished from the web, Laakso et al. (2021) found that university-affiliated journals made up 40% (70 of the 174) of those found to have disappeared. While the high representation of UJs is in line with their overall presence among OA journals in general, there are likely factors unique to UJs that can make their existence volatile.

Universities collaborating with other organizations for journal publishing

Most bibliometric studies that include distinction between publisher types, like all the ones mentioned in this section so far, do so on the basis of whatever single organization is mentioned in the publisher metadata field from where the bibliometric data is extracted. However, in reality there are often multiple organizations of various types involved in variable constellations sharing the ownership, governance, and work required to operate the journal. There are so far a couple of studies that have studied dimensions related to this additional layer of complexity that are useful for better understanding also the situation of UJs and their publishing arrangements.

In a study covering all Australian scholarly journals, Jamali et al. (2022) utilized the “Corporate Author” metadata field found in Ulrichsweb to investigate what type of organizations are behind the journals in addition to the organization designated in the “Publisher” metadata field. The study conducted manual categorization of both publishers and corporate authors, where universities were part of the “Educational institutions” category. Of the 651 active journals that were included in the study, 168 (26%) had an educational institution as the corporate author. Of these, most of 131 also self-published the journal, but some also relied on other organizations for acting as the publisher: International commercial publisher (21), Educational institution (11), Small commercial

publisher (3), and Government (2). Most of the Australian OA journals that do not charge APCs are self-published by educational institutions.

Taskin et al. (2023) analyzed 21,886 journals in the WoS Core Collection (2022) to identify publisher types and issuing bodies based on ISSN Center records. They found that 17% were published by universities, rising to 28% when journals issued by research organizations were included. A notable share were journals formally issued by research organizations but published by professional publishers. These titles showed a distinctive language profile, with higher proportions of non-English and multilingual journals, particularly in Latin America. Consistent with other studies, research-organization journals were most strongly concentrated in the social sciences, humanities, and arts.

This body of bibliometric studies highlights the need for a pluralistic approach when analyzing the global journal landscape. No single bibliographic source suffices; instead, a combination of different sources are required to adequately represent the diversity of UJ publishing.

Methodology

Data collection and processing

This study uses a multi-database approach to identify UJs, with Ulrichsweb serving as the primary data source due to its extensive coverage and advanced filtering capabilities. The database has previously been employed in large-scale bibliometric research. Mongeon and Paul-Hus (2016) used Ulrichsweb, comparing it to coverage in WoS and Scopus, finding linguistic, disciplinary, and geographic biases in both indexes, reinforcing the role of Ulrichsweb as a more neutral and comprehensive starting point. Similarly, Laakso and Multas (2023) used Ulrichsweb to map scholarly journals from small- and mid-sized publishers across Europe, for which the more inclusive bibliometric data was better suited to capture also smaller and non-English journals. Based on Ulrichsweb data, Nazarovets (2024) reviewed scholarly journal publishing in Ukraine, demonstrating the potential of this database for underrepresented journals. However, even though Ulrichsweb contains a comprehensive number of journals globally, it should not be assumed that all scholarly journals are included, for that one would need to collect national and regional datasets which this study does not do.

We queried Ulrichsweb between March and May 2025, extracting metadata for all active peer-reviewed, academic/scholarly journals, resulting in an initial dataset of 99,347 entries.

In this study, UJs are defined based on the institutional nature of their publisher. A journal is considered a UJ if it is currently published by a university or an organizational unit operating under the authority of a HEI. This includes faculties, departments, university libraries, university research centers, and university presses. While publishing models and levels of autonomy may vary, such entities function within the formal structure of their parent institutions. Accordingly, journals published by long-established university presses, such as Oxford University Press or Cambridge University Press, are included, despite occasionally being classified as commercial publishers in other typologies. Their inclusion reflects the diversity of historical and structural roles of institutional publishing models across academic systems.

We deliberately adopted the broader category of HEIs rather than restricting the scope to entities explicitly labelled “university”. This approach acknowledges the global diversity of academic publishing structures. In many national contexts, UJs are issued not only by universities but also by specialized HEIs, such as polytechnic institutes, colleges, or professional schools, that fulfil comparable academic and publishing functions. Affiliation was determined using a two-step process. First, we used the World Higher Education Database (WHED) (International Association of Universities, n.d.) to identify institutional name variants, standardize the recognition of HEIs across countries and country-level counts of HEIs. Second, based on this WHEN, we developed a multilingual keyword-matching algorithm in Excel that searched the metadata extracted from Ulrichsweb for institutional descriptors associated with universities across various languages. This filtering process yielded a subset of 39,916 journal records likely to be affiliated with universities.

Due to variations in ISSNs and titles across different formats (online, print etc.), many journals were represented by multiple entries. We therefore conducted a deduplication process to consolidate duplicate records, which included both automated filtering and manual review. In addition to resolving duplicates, we performed a manual validation step to confirm the institutional affiliation of each journal. After this cleaning and validation process, our final dataset comprised 19,414 unique UJs that appear either in print, on the web, or both formats. The ISSN list has been deposited in Zenodo (Taşkın et al., 2025a), to serve as a reference for future research.

Subject metadata for each journal were retrieved from Ulrichsweb using its primary classification scheme. To enable cross-comparison with international standards, we converted Ulrichsweb subject categories to the OECD Fields of Science and Technology (FOS) classification. This conversion followed the methodology proposed by Taşkın et al. (2024), with one modification: the “Social Sciences” and “Humanities” fields were merged into a single category to simplify disciplinary groupings. Journals assigned to more than two subject categories were classified as “Multidisciplinary” to reflect their broader scope. The detailed conversion schema is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Subject conversion table

Ulrichsweb subject category	OECD Fields of Science and Technology
Biological Sciences and Agriculture	Natural sciences and agriculture (NATURAGRI)
Chemistry	
Earth, Space, and Environmental Sciences	
Mathematics	
Physics	
Technology & Engineering	Engineering & technology (ENGTECH)
Medicine and Health	Medical and health sciences (MEDHEALTH)
Sports, Hobbies, and Recreation	
Arts and Literature	Social sciences and humanities (SSH)
Business and Economics	
Education	
Ethnic Studies, Gender, and Lifestyle	
Government, Law and Public Administration	
Philosophy and Religion	
Reference and Bibliographies	
Social Sciences and Humanities	
Journals assigned to more than two subject categories	Multidisciplinary (MULTIDIS)

Country and language information for each journal was also obtained from Ulrichsweb. Following the Ulrichsweb classification, our dataset includes both sovereign states and non-sovereign territories or regions (e.g., Guam, Macau, United States Virgin Islands), which are listed individually as countries in the database. For the classification of countries, we applied the World Bank's (2025) country classification scheme, which groups countries based on income levels and geographical regions. Language data were categorized into four distinct classes to reflect linguistic diversity and dominance: (1) English, (2) Multilingual with English, (3) Multilingual without English, and (4) Other Languages (i.e., single-language journals in languages other than English).

To evaluate the visibility of UJs in major global indexing systems, we cross-referenced the final UJs dataset with publicly available journal lists from four different types major databases: selective commercial (Scopus and the WoS Core Collection), inclusive OA indexing (DOAJ), and emerging open bibliometric infrastructures (OpenAlex). For Scopus, we relied on the Source title list provided by Elsevier (n.d.). For the WoS, we utilized the Master Journal List provided by Clarivate (n.d.). All index lists (for the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE), the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), and the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)) were retrieved in May 2025 to ensure consistency in temporal coverage. The OpenAlex data were obtained from an open dataset published on Zenodo (Van Eck, 2024). The DOAJ data were retrieved from the official Public Data Dump (DOAJ, n.d.). Journals were matched across these sources using available identifiers, ISSNs, eISSNs, and ISSN-Ls, as well as title information, to determine their presence in each indexing service.

Each database offers distinct strengths and limitations. DOAJ, for instance, is widely used to study the structural characteristics of OA publications specifically. Del Río Riande and Lujano Vilchis (2024) use the DOAJ database to explore the multilingual landscape of OA journals, highlighting DOAJ's value for mapping underrepresented journals and examining global patterns of bibliodiversity. In a recent comparative study, Simard et al. (2025) conducted a systematic comparison of the geographic and linguistic coverage of gold and diamond OA journals in OpenAlex, Scopus, and WoS. They found that diamond journals are significantly underrepresented in commercial databases, and OpenAlex is better in coverage concerning journals in non-English national languages, lower-income regions, and the SSH. These findings further emphasize the need to use multiple databases when assessing the visibility of university-affiliated journals.

To examine the OA status of UJs, we combined metadata from Ulrichsweb and the DOAJ. Ulrichsweb classifies journals into OA and non-OA categories, while DOAJ provides additional information on whether indexed journals apply article processing charges (APCs).

All data processing and descriptive analyses were conducted using spreadsheet-based operations and standard analytical tools. These were used to clean and merge datasets from Ulrichsweb, DOAJ, Scopus, the Web of Science Master Journal List, and OpenAlex, as well as to generate frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, and proportional indicators.

For visual representation of results, we used Microsoft Excel and Flourish.Studio, a web-based data visualization tool, to generate interactive charts, bar plots, and geographic maps. This approach enabled clear visual presentation of complex patterns in the journal data.

Assessment of the reliability and database-specific limitations

Ulrichsweb: limitations in peer-review classification and journal metadata

As Ulrichsweb served as the primary data source, we conducted a targeted assessment of its metadata reliability. To ensure the inclusion of peer-reviewed scholarly journals, only those explicitly marked in Ulrichsweb as “Refereed/Peer-reviewed” were selected. Nevertheless, this criterion may have inadvertently excluded some peer-reviewed UJs due to incomplete or inaccurate metadata. According to the Ulrichsweb (n.d.), the refereed label is based on publisher self-reporting, which is not always systematically updated.

To identify potential limitations in the automated analysis, a preliminary assessment (January–February 2025) was conducted on a randomly selected sample of 10 countries, without consideration of regional distribution or other selection criteria. We calculated the number of active UJs indexed by Ulrichsweb in each country and determined how many of them had a Refereed/Peer-reviewed metadata entry. For journals lacking this designation, we manually searched their websites for information on peer-review policies. Additionally, we checked whether these journals were indexed in DOAJ using ISSN-based searches.

The results (Table S1) revealed substantial inconsistencies. In several cases, refereed status was missing in Ulrichsweb despite clear evidence of peer review on the journal’s site and inclusion in other databases. For example, in Argentina, 187 active UJs lacked refereed status, yet 53 were confirmed as peer-reviewed on their websites, and 32 appeared in DOAJ. Similar patterns were observed in Bolivia, Yemen, and Cyprus. In countries with few journals, even a single metadata omission could result in full exclusion from the dataset – as in Benin and the Bahamas. However, in some cases, the Ulrichsweb metadata was aligned with verification results. For example, in Barbados (five active UJs), only one had refereed status, while the remaining four lacked sufficient evidence of peer review, confirming the accuracy of Ulrichsweb data.

Overall, this data reliability analysis highlights significant variability in how the refereed label is applied across countries and journals, limiting the precision of automated journal selection. While we acknowledge the potential for both omissions and outdated classifications, manually verifying the entire dataset is not feasible within the scope of this study. Despite such limitations, Ulrichsweb remains the most comprehensive available resource for academic journal metadata.

Also, journals’ founding years recorded in Ulrichsweb are often inaccurate or incomplete. Some entries list implausible founding dates, while others lack information entirely. Moreover, the historical affiliation of journals may have changed over time, but only the current publisher is reflected in the metadata. Consequently, trends in journal establishment must be interpreted cautiously.

Global coverage vs. regional sources

To maintain methodological consistency and avoid regional overrepresentation, Ulrichsweb was used as the single global source for identifying UJs. We did not collect and extract data from regional indexing platforms such as SciELO, Redalyc, Dialnet and CNKI in order to identify UJs. This choice necessarily implies that some university journals indexed only in local or regional databases may not be captured. This limitation should be kept in mind when interpreting country-level totals.

OpenAlex: incomplete publisher-level metadata

In addition to the limitations identified in Ulrichsweb, it is important to acknowledge critical metadata issues observed in OpenAlex. Although OpenAlex holds promise as a more inclusive and open alternative to commercial indexing systems, it suffers from significant gaps in publisher-level metadata, which makes it difficult to identify and classify university-affiliated journals (Nazarovets, 2025b). Specifically, the metadata fields responsible for capturing institutional affiliation, such as *host_organization* and *host_organization_lineage*, are often missing for a large share of UJs. These omissions undermine OpenAlex's potential as a reliable sole source for analysis at the journal publisher level.

Additional metadata uncertainties

Similarly, metadata on OA status is subject to gaps in coverage and inconsistencies. Ulrichsweb OA flags rely on information supplied by publishers that may not reflect policy changes in real time, while DOAJ is a curated, opt-in registry that does not index all OA journals comprehensively. Therefore, differences between the two sources were anticipated.

The HEI counts used for the UJs per HEI indicator reflect the best global HEI registry, WHED. However, the database is not exhaustive as it is dependent on national reporting, which differs across countries, leading to some systems being under- or overrepresented in terms of data availability. These structural inconsistencies should be considered when interpreting cross-national comparisons.

The dataset reflects a snapshot in time (March–May 2025). Delays in updating metadata in Ulrichsweb or other platforms may result in undercounting recently established journals or overcounting ceased ones that are still marked as being active.

Although the dataset was partially verified manually, a complete manual verification of over 19,000 titles was not possible to perform. As a result, errors or inconsistencies may remain in the metadata.

Results

This section presents the main empirical findings of the study, based on the dataset of UJs compiled from Ulrichsweb and cross-referenced with additional metadata from Scopus, DOAJ, OpenAlex, and WoS.

Indexing status and geographical distribution

The dataset includes 19,414 active UJs from 148 countries. Of these, 6,058 are published in online format only, 1,604 in print only, and 11,752 in both formats.

Indexing coverage varied greatly across bibliographic databases (Table 2). All journals in the dataset are listed in Ulrichsweb by definition, since that was the foundational starting point for the data collection. OpenAlex provides the broadest secondary coverage, indexing almost three quarters of all UJs (73.7%, 14,315 titles). DOAJ includes nearly half (45.9%, 8,904), reflecting the strong orientation of UJs toward OA models. Scopus covers 24.7% of the dataset (4,794) and WoS Core Collection only 19.3% (3,740), with substantial variation across its constituent indexes. 17.4% of UJs (3,384) are absent from all four analyzed databases, except Ulrichsweb.

Table 2 Total UJs indexed across major bibliographic databases

Database	UJs indexed	% of total
Ulrichsweb	19,414	100%
OpenAlex	14,315	73.7%
DOAJ	8,904	45.9%
Scopus	4,794	24.7%
WoS Core Collection	3,740	19.3%
● SCIE	● 689	
● SSCI	● 539	
● AHCI	● 614	
● ESCI	● 2,100	

Country-level analysis

At the country level, the distribution of UJs is highly skewed. The United States and Indonesia dominate the landscape (2,188 and 2,131 titles respectively), followed by Brazil, Russia, the United Kingdom, Türkiye, Ukraine, Spain, Iran and Poland (see Table 3). Together, these ten countries account for nearly two-thirds (62.92%) of all UJs identified in Ulrichsweb. At the opposite end of the spectrum, 16 countries are represented by only one title.

To contextualize the raw journal counts, the UJs-per-HEI ratio (Table 3 and Fig. 1) offers additional insight into national publishing intensity. Spain and Türkiye exhibit notably high ratios, indicating dense journal activity relative to system size. The UK also shows a high value, although this figure is partly shaped by the substantial global publishing portfolios of its two major university presses Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, which together operate far beyond the scope of domestic institutional publishing alone. By contrast, the USA, despite having the world's largest number of UJs in absolute terms, has a comparatively low ratio of UJs-per-HEI.

Figure 2 and Table S2 illustrate the representation of UJs in global databases by country.

Table 3 Top 10 countries by number of UJs, HEI counts, and UJs per HEI

	Country	Number of UJs	Number of HEIs (WHED)	UJs per HEI
1	United States	2,188	2,550	0.86
2	Indonesia	2,131	1,258	1.69
3	Brazil	1,530	1,447	1.06
4	Russia	1,179	603	1.96
5	United Kingdom	1,069	245	4.36
6	Türkiye	1,024	191	5.36
7	Ukraine	986	297	3.32
8	Spain	761	112	6.79
9	Iran	719	450	1.60
10	Poland	628	405	1.55

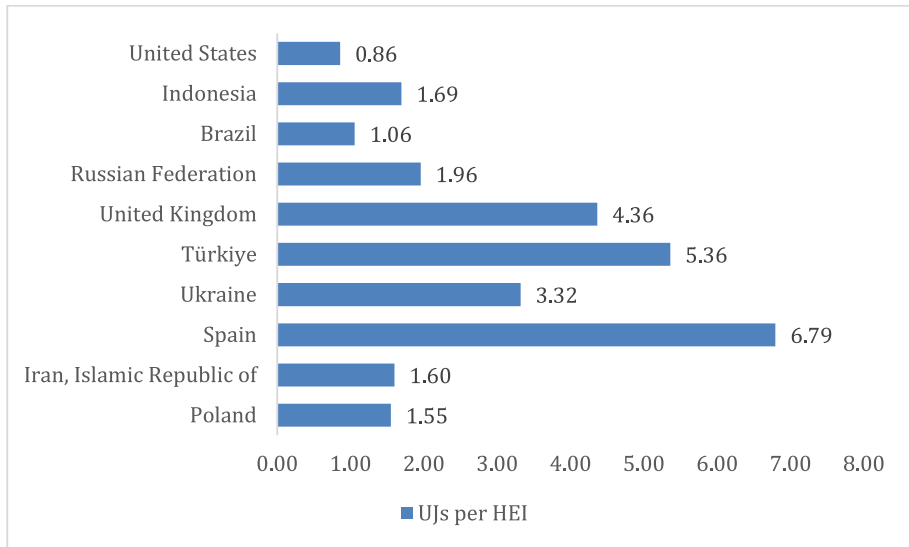


Fig. 1 UJs per HEI ratio for the top 10 countries

Coverage in selective commercial indexes

- In **Scopus**, the largest *absolute* numbers of UJs belong to USA (898), UK (756), Spain (327), Brazil (205), and Iran (196). In *relative* terms, among countries with at least 10 UJs, the highest inclusion rates are observed in Croatia (72.4%), UK (70.7%), Estonia (65%), Singapore (60%), and Jordan (51.7%). 44 countries represented in Ulrichsweb have no UJs indexed in Scopus.
- Most UJs indexed in **WoS** are covered by the *ESCI*, with minimal representation in the three leading WoS indexes (SCIE, SSCI and AHCI). The countries with the highest absolute numbers of WoS-indexed UJs largely mirror those in Scopus: USA (743), UK (722), Spain (322), Brazil (202) and Colombia (131). In terms of *relative* coverage, the highest inclusion rates (among countries with at least 10 UJs) are observed in the UK (67.5%), Croatia (54%), Spain (42.3%), Malaysia (39.8%), and South Korea (38.1%). 58 countries in the dataset have no UJs indexed in WoS.

Coverage in emerging open bibliometric infrastructures

In contrast to commercial indexes, **OpenAlex** provides considerably broader coverage of UJs. The five countries with the highest *absolute* number of UJs are Indonesia (1,942), USA (1,560), Brazil (1,236), UK (925) and Russian Federation (832). The highest *relative* inclusion rates (for countries with at least 10 UJs) are observed in Qatar (100%), Uruguay (95%), Viet Nam (85.7%), Croatia (92%) and North Macedonia (91.7%). Only 14 countries in the dataset have no UJs indexed in OpenAlex.

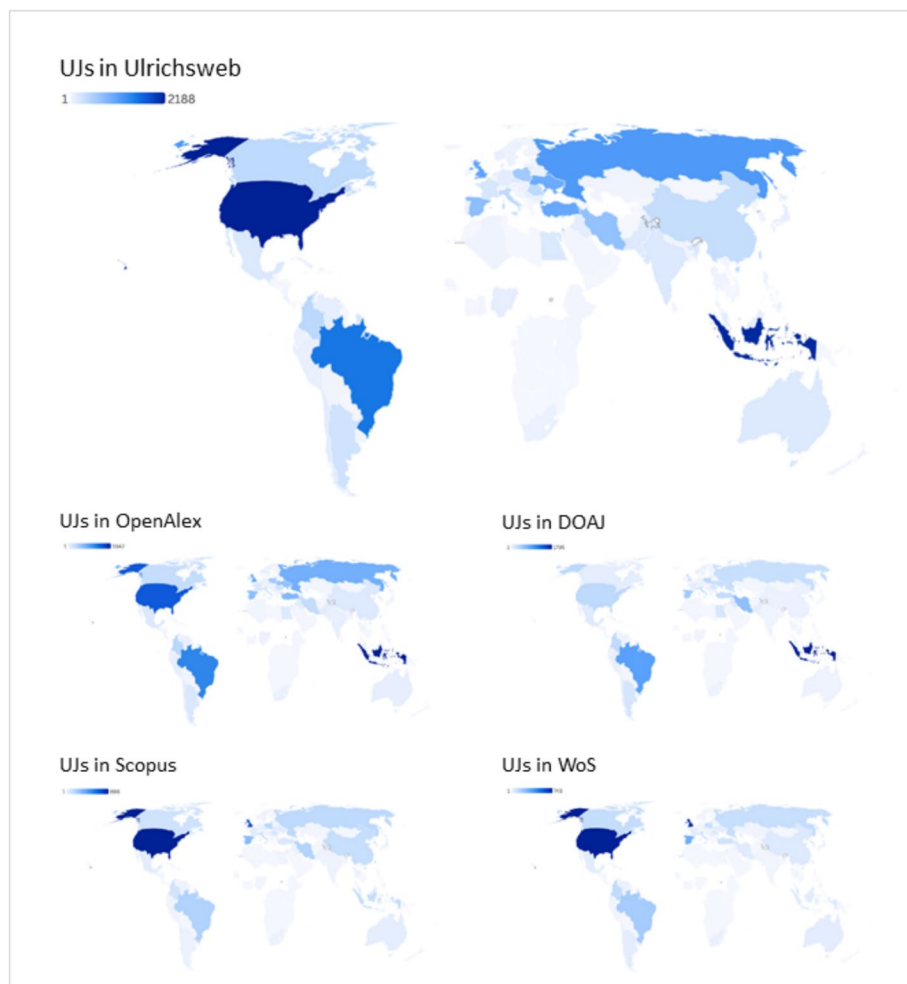


Fig. 2 Global indexing coverage of Ulrichsweb-indexed UJs in databases (for an interactive map: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/23781336/>)

Coverage in inclusive OA index

In **DOAJ**, the top five countries by absolute number of indexed UJs are Indonesia (1,764), Brazil (885), Iran (598), Spain (487), and Poland (344). The highest *relative* inclusion rates (among countries with at least 10 UJs) are found in Iraq (96.9%), Egypt (90.5%), Paraguay (90%), Uruguay (90%) and Yemen (90%). Despite this broad coverage, 25 countries have no UJs indexed in DOAJ.

Several countries, such as Vietnam, Kenya, or Syria, had no UJs indexed in either Scopus or WoS, while showing moderate to high coverage in OpenAlex (29 countries; 33–100% of titles per country) and DOAJ (21 countries; 9–100%). We did not find any UJs from Cambodia (2 titles), Guam (4), Macau (1), Eswatini (1), and the United States Virgin Islands (1) in any database other than Ulrichsweb.

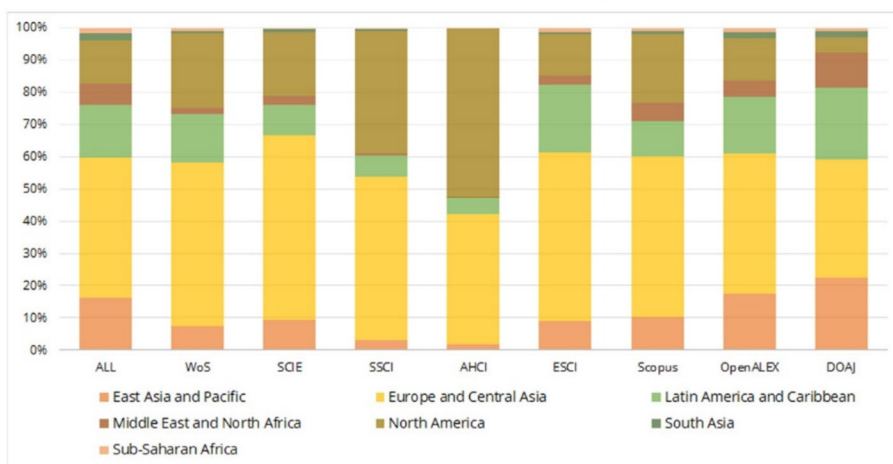
Distribution by regional and income classifications

In addition to the country-level analysis, UJs were grouped by *regional* World Bank classification. Regional aggregation reduces the noise inherent in country-level variation and makes it possible to identify broader geographical patterns that may be obscured when examining countries individually. However, it is important to note that our study observed that the distribution of UJs among *countries within the regions* was found to be uneven, so one should not generalize results to entire regions without taking the following into account:

- According to Ulrichsweb, in Europe and Central Asia five countries – Russia (1,179), UK (1,069), Türkiye (1,024), Ukraine (986) and Spain (761) – account for over 60% of all UJs in the region. By contrast, many others, including Germany (137), Denmark (67) and Austria (50), have significantly smaller numbers of UJs despite having strong research infrastructures.
- A similarly pronounced concentration appears in the East Asia and Pacific: Indonesia alone accounts for 2,131 titles – over two-thirds (68%) of all UJs in the region. China (310), Australia (187) and Malaysia (123) also contribute notable volumes, whereas Brunei, Papua New Guinea and Laos each have only a single identified UJ.
- Latin America and the Caribbean shows a similar pattern: Brazil alone accounts for nearly half of the region's UJs (1,530 out of 3,124), followed by Colombia (425), Argentina (278), Mexico (191), Chile (145), and Peru (97). Together, these six countries host over 85% of all UJs in the region. Several smaller countries, including Barbados, Grenada, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, report only one UJ each.
- In the Middle East and North Africa Iran alone accounts for 719 titles – more than half (56%) of the region's total, while Egypt (199) and Iraq (128) follow with significantly lower figures. Most other countries host relatively few UJs, with Bahrain, Libya, and Tunisia each reporting fewer than five.
- The North America region consists exclusively of UJs from the USA (2,188 titles) and Canada (414).
- In South Asia, India (190) and Pakistan (174) together account for over 80% of the region's UJs. Nepal (27), Bangladesh (23), and Sri Lanka (24) have modest publishing activity, while Afghanistan and Bhutan are represented by only a handful of titles.
- Two countries – Nigeria (120) and South Africa (83) – together account for nearly 60% of the Sub-Saharan Africa region's output. Ghana, Kenya, and Ethiopia also demonstrate moderate publishing activity, each hosting over 20 UJs. Most of countries in the region are represented by fewer than 10 journals.

With that information firmly in mind, Fig 3a visualizes the proportions of UJs from across the regions indexed in the different databases. All databases have UJs from Europe and Central Asia as the highest relative share (ranging between approximately 40% to 60%), with the exception of AHCI where North American UJs are more dominant. Another notable divergence in terms of this analysis is that above 20% of UJs indexed in DOAJ are from East Asia and the Pacific, where other non-OA exclusive indexes have lower shares. At the same time, North American UJs indexed in DOAJ make up the smallest share of North American UJs in any index.

a) Distribution of UJs across country groups by region



b) Distribution of UJs across country groups by income

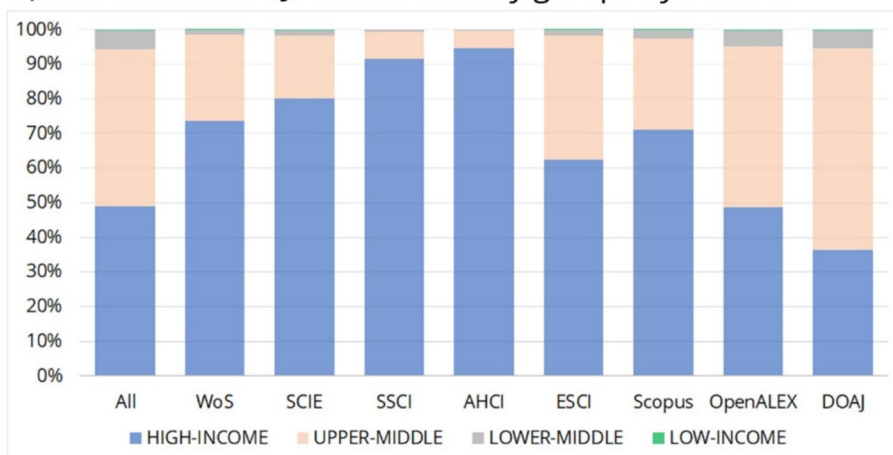


Fig. 3 Distribution of UJs by country income and region

Grouping of countries by *World Bank income classification* and analysis of relative indexation distribution of UJs belonging to different classifications is provided in Fig. 3b. Looking at the entire dataset of UJs indexed in Ulrichsweb, nearly 50% are published in high-income countries, and approximately 45% in upper-middle income countries, with only minimal shares for lower income classifications. This distribution is relatively similar within UJs indexed in DOAJ and OpenAlex, but for the rest of the indexes the share of UJs from high-income countries increases even further from above 60% in the ESCI to approximately 95% for the AHCI.

Founding year distribution

An attempt to identify the oldest UJ in the dataset revealed several difficulties, as some of the earliest-listed titles in Ulrichsweb show implausible founding years. For example, *Geografias* (ISSN 1808–8058), published by the Department of Geography at the *Federal University of Minas Gerais*, is listed with a founding year of 1805, whereas external sources confirm that it was established in 2005. Attempts to verify such information in external databases or on journal websites often prove inconclusive, as this is rarely documented consistently or transparently. At this stage, the analysis relies on Ulrichsweb metadata without retrospective correction. A more accurate reconstruction of the historical development of UJ publishing would require bibliographic and archival research, which is beyond the scope of this study.

As data on the founding year was not consistently available for both the print and online versions of all UJs in Ulrichsweb, the analysis was limited to titles for which this information was present for at least one version. The reference point was the founding year of the earliest available version. The analysis is based on 18,820 UJs. It shows that the distribution worldwide is significantly skewed towards the most recent decades (Fig. 4):

- The oldest journal found was established in 1771. Throughout the nineteenth century and until the 1940s, the number of newly created UJs remained low, rarely exceeding ten titles per year. One needs to remember that this study and data collection concerns only currently active titles, ceased titles are not part of this analysis.
- From the late 1940s onward, the annual number of UJs increased steadily. Starting in the mid-1970s, more than 100 new titles appeared annually. This upward trend continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with annual counts reaching 140 titles in 1985 and over 300 by the mid-1990s.

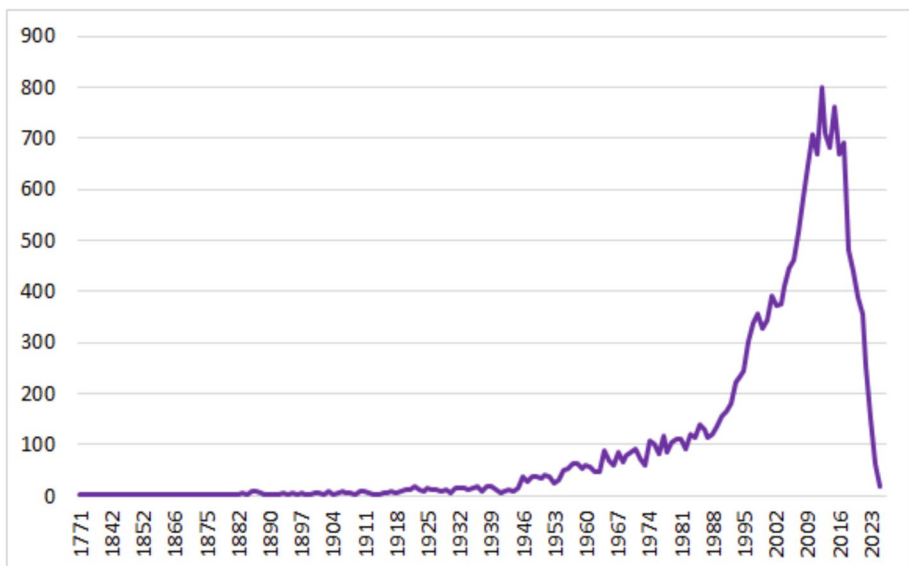


Fig. 4 Distribution of UJs by founding year worldwide

- The highest figures were recorded between 2005 and 2015, with more than 400 new UJs founded each year during this period. The peak year was 2012, with 799 new titles appearing. After 2015, numbers remained high, with over 600 new UJs appearing each year until 2018.
- Since 2018, the number of new UJs has declined: from 388 in 2020 to 356 in 2021, then to 255 in 2022 and finally to 152 in 2023. Just 63 and 20 journals were reported in 2024 and 2025 respectively, possibly due to delays in entering data for newly created titles in Ulrichsweb.

While the general trend shows a sharp increase in UJs creation after 2000, the pace and timing of this growth differ by region (Fig. 5):

- In Europe and Central Asia, UJs creation remained modest throughout the twentieth century, followed by a marked acceleration after 2000. The annual number of new titles peaked at over 300 around 2012–2015, with a subsequent decline in recent years.
- A similar pattern is observed in East Asia and the Pacific, where UJs activity began to rise in the 1990s and peaked in the mid-2010s at approximately 230 titles per year.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, the growth was more gradual, beginning in the 1970s and continuing steadily until peaking above 120 new titles annually around 2013. Unlike other regions, the decline after 2015 appears more moderate.
- North America shows a relatively balanced and consistent growth curve from the mid-twentieth century onwards, reaching its highest point at nearly 90 new UJs per year around 2010, followed by a gradual decrease.
- In the Middle East and North Africa, growth remained limited until the early 2000s, after which it increased rapidly, peaking at about 80 UJs annually in the mid-2010s. A decline is also visible in recent years.
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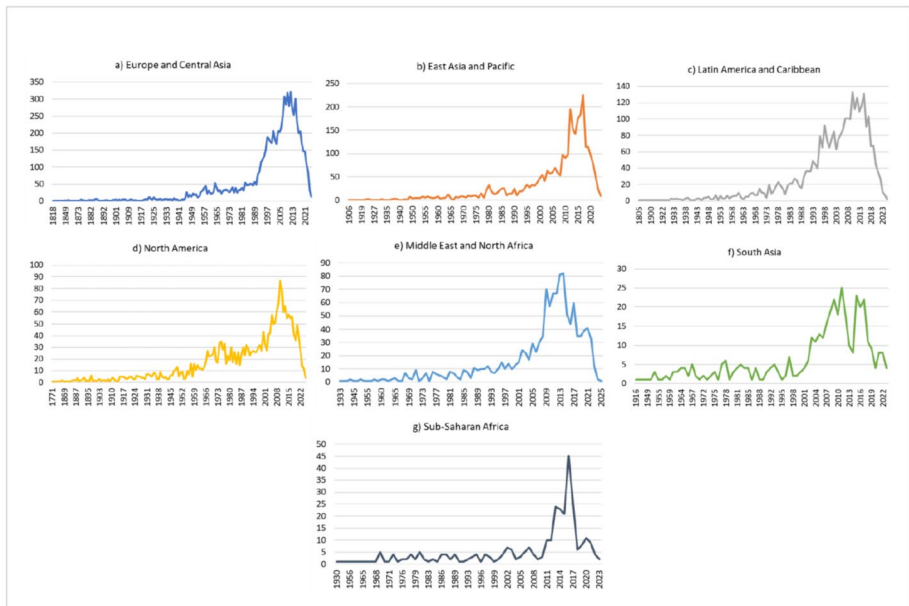


Fig. 5 Distribution of UJs by founding year by regions

- South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have lower overall volumes, but both regions experienced visible expansion in the 2000s. In South Asia, the number of new UJs reached around 25 per year, while in Sub-Saharan Africa, it rose to around 45 – a significant increase compared to previous decades. In both cases, a decline has been observed since 2015.

Journal languages

The linguistic composition of UJs reflects substantial diversity in publication languages. Figure 6 presents the language distribution of UJs across the major indexing databases, categorized into four language groups: English, multilingual with English, multilingual without English, and monolingual in other (non-English) languages:

- According to **Ulrichsweb** metadata, 6,877 (35.4%) UJs publish exclusively in English. An additional 4,349 (22.4%) journals follow a multilingual model that includes English. A smaller group of 656 journals (3.4%) is multilingual without English, and 7,532 (38.8%) publish in a single non-English language. Only six journals (0.03%) in the dataset do not specify a language of publication.
- **Scopus** displays a much stronger orientation toward English: 2,723 (56.8%) UJs are English-only and 889 (18.5%) are multilingual with English. UJs published in a single non-English language include 1,085 (22.6%) titles, while 97 (2%) UJs are multilingual without English. Overall, more than 75% of Scopus-indexed UJs include English as a publication language.
- A similar pattern appears in the **WoS**, where English-only UJs represent 2,119 (56.7%) titles, and 689 (18.4%) are multilingual with English. A notable share – 879 (23.5%) of UJs – publish exclusively in a single non-English language, representing the second-largest language group among WoS-indexed UJs. An additional 53 (1.4%) journals are multilingual without English. However, when looking at individual WoS databases, it becomes clear that non-English-language UJs are concentrated primarily in ESCI,

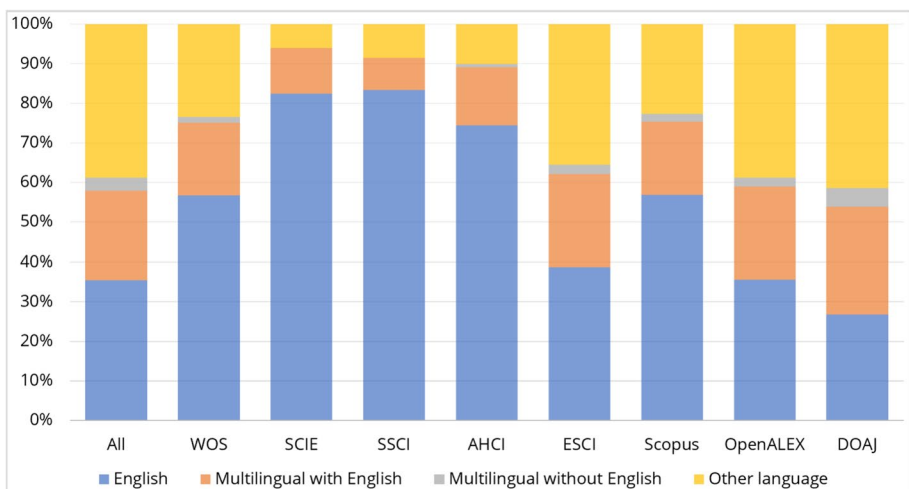


Fig. 6 Language distribution of UJs across indexes

which includes 747 such journals (35.6% of all UJs indexed in ESCI). By contrast, English-only UJs dominate SCIE (569, 82.6%), SSCI (449, 83.2%) and AHCI (457, 74.4%).

- In **OpenAlex** presents a more balanced picture, with 5,567 (38.9%) monolingual non-English UJs, 5,095 (35.6%) English-only titles, 3,348 (23.4%) multilingual with English, and 305 (2.1%) multilingual without English.
- In **DOAJ**, 3,691 (41.5%) UJs are monolingual in a non-English language, 2,416 (27.1%) are multilingual with English, 2,374 (26.7%) are English-only, and 423 (4.8%) are multilingual without English.

The linguistic profiles of UJs differ substantially across world regions (Fig. 7):

- English-only UJs dominate in South Asia (91.2%), North America (90.2%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (86.3%). While Latin America and the Caribbean presents the opposite pattern, with only 2.5% English-only journals and 78.5% published exclusively in a non-English language.
- Europe and Central Asia shows the broadest linguistic diversity, with large numbers of UJs across all categories, including 30.7% multilingual with English and more than 38.7% monolingual non-English journals. A similar, though less pronounced, pattern is observed in East Asia and the Pacific.
- The Middle East and North Africa is notable for having the highest number of multilingual journals without English (25.5%), a pattern largely absent in other regions.

Overall, these contrasts indicate striking regional differences in language practices, with English dominance in some regions and high non-English and multilingual presence in others.

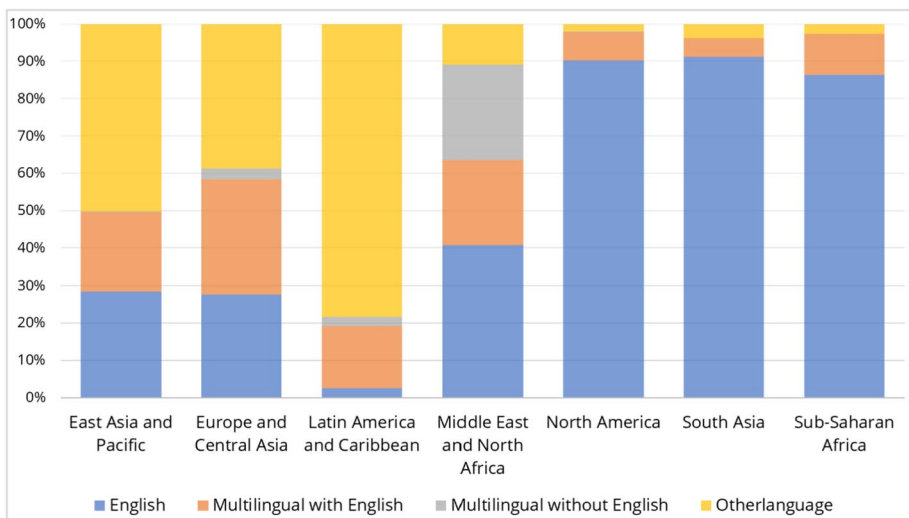


Fig. 7 Language distribution of UJs across regions

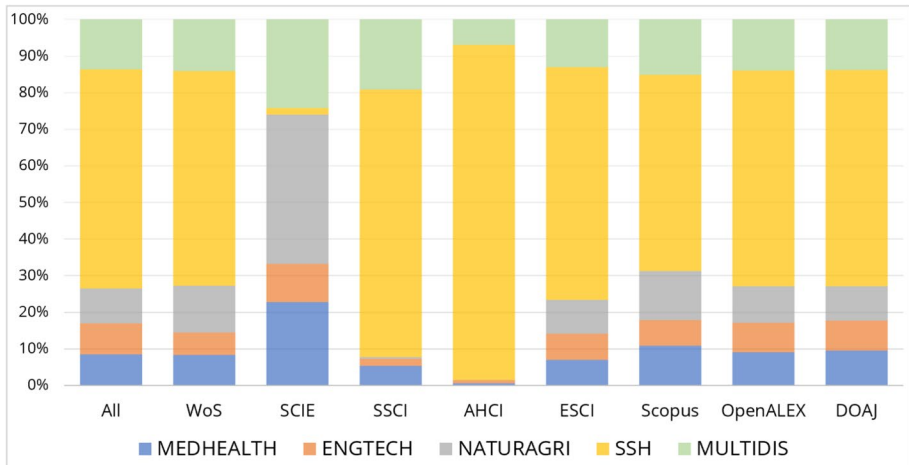


Fig. 8 Subject distribution of UJs across indexes

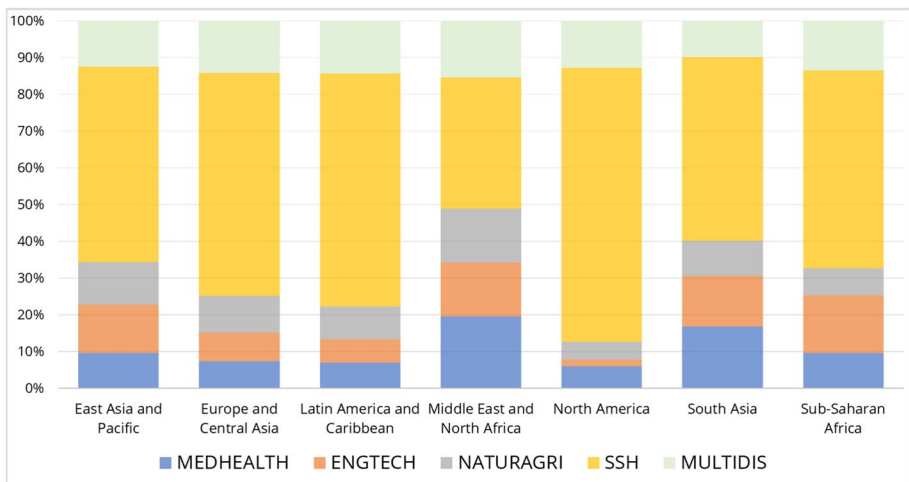


Fig. 9 Subject distribution of UJs across regions

Disciplinary patterns in UJs publishing

Figure 8 illustrates the disciplinary distribution of UJs across five broad categories: Medical and Health Sciences (MEDHEALTH), Engineering and Technology (ENGTECH), Natural and Agricultural Sciences (NATURAGRI), Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), and Multidisciplinary journals (MULTIDIS).

The disciplinary profile of UJs shows a clear predominance of SSH across the dataset outside of SCIE which through its disciplinary focus does not target SSH research.

Figure 9 presents the distribution of UJs by subject area across world regions. While SSH represents the largest category, their relative weight differs notably across regions:

- SSH journals constitute the majority of UJs in most regions, reaching their highest shares in North America (74.6%), Latin America and the Caribbean (63.5%), and Europe and Central Asia (60.6%). In East Asia and Pacific, SSH still accounts for more than half of all UJs (53.2%). By contrast, in the Middle East and North Africa (35.8%), the dominance of SSH is less pronounced, reflecting a more balanced disciplinary profile.
- The share of multidisciplinary UJs is relatively consistent across most regions, ranging from 9.8% in South Asia to 15.3% in the Middle East and North Africa.
- Regional variation is also visible in MEDHEALTH, where the Middle East and North Africa stands out again with nearly one-fifth (19.6%) of UJs. Most other regions range between 6 and 10%.
- The share of ENGTECH UJs is relatively similar across most regions, with notably higher proportions in the Middle East and North Africa (14.6%), the East Asia and Pacific (13.2%), and South Asia (13.8%). North America stands out with a distinctly low share of just 1.8%.
- NATURAGRI exhibits modest regional differences, with the highest proportions in the Middle East and North Africa (14.7%) and the East Asia and Pacific (11.6%). North America shows notably lower shares at 4.8%.

Open access and APC status of UJs

Figure 10 shows the OA status of UJs when comparing Ulrichsweb and DOAJ classifications. According to Ulrichsweb metadata, 9,041 UJs (46.6%) are labelled as OA and 10,373 (53.4%) as non-OA. Cross-checking the dataset with the DOAJ revealed that 8,904 UJs are indexed there. Closer inspection reveals inconsistencies between sources. For instance, 541 journals marked as non-OA in Ulrichsweb are indexed in DOAJ, while 678 journals labelled as OA in Ulrichsweb are absent from DOAJ.

According to the DOAJ, 2,108 (23.7%) of UJs charge APCs and 6,796 (76.3%) do not. At first glance, these numbers suggest that a clear majority of UJs indexed in DOAJ operate under a Diamond OA model, with no publication fees for authors.

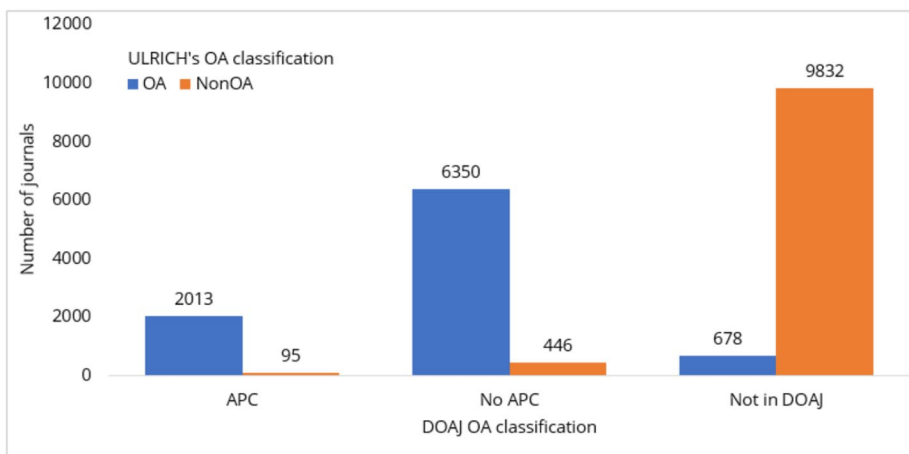


Fig. 10 OA status of UJs based on Ulrichsweb and DOAJ classifications

Discussion

The global map of UJs, as derived from Ulrichsweb, shows a large and highly uneven publishing landscape. UJs are present in 148 countries, but their distribution, scale and visibility vary significantly between academic systems. While some national contexts support extensive institutional publishing, others host only limited activity. Some journals interface with multiple indexing systems, while many remain visible only within Ulrichsweb. These contrasts suggest that UJs constitute a diverse publishing layer influenced by national academic structures, institutional capabilities, and varying levels of integration within the global scholarly communication system.

Global and regional inequalities in indexing coverage

Indexing patterns across global bibliographic databases reveal deep geographical inequalities in the visibility of UJs. Although Ulrichsweb shows that universities across most countries actively participate in journal publishing, this activity is not proportionally reflected in selective commercial indexes. OpenAlex provides the broadest coverage of UJs, indexing nearly three-quarters of the dataset, followed by the OA-specific DOAJ with nearly half UJs, while Scopus and the WoS Core Collection index only a small fraction of all them. As a result, much university-based publishing remains invisible within mainstream global research assessment and discoverability infrastructures, echoing earlier concerns about the marginalization of locally oriented journals (Khanna et al., 2022; Kulczycki et al., 2025).

These disparities become even more pronounced *at the country level*. A few countries – most notably the USA, UK, and Spain – dominate WoS Core Collection and Scopus. This visibility, however, does not reflect overall journal production: countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, and Iran exhibit high numbers of UJs but are underrepresented in these selective indexes, despite more substantial visibility in OpenAlex and DOAJ. Conversely, countries with smaller UJ populations, e.g. Croatia and Estonia, have much higher relative indexing rates in WoS and Scopus. This asymmetry is especially visible in the core citation indexes of WoS (SCIE, SSCI, and AHCI).

A shift to the *region level* reveals further inequalities that are not visible from individual country cases alone. UJs from Europe and North America dominate in WoS and Scopus, while Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa are significantly underrepresented despite considerable publishing activity documented in Ulrichsweb. This highlights how entire parts of the world are systematically incorporated into, or excluded from, selective indexing infrastructures. On the other hand, OpenAlex and DOAJ capture a more diverse global distribution. They include large numbers of UJs from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and parts of the Middle East and North Africa – regions where OA platforms and university-led publishing initiatives play an important role in disseminating scholarly work.

Relative indexing rates deepen this regional contrast. In both Scopus and WoS, UJs from North America, Europe, and Central Asia are indexed at substantially higher rates, while regions such as South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa consistently have low inclusion rates despite having significant output in Ulrichsweb. By contrast, DOAJ and OpenAlex more closely align with the actual distribution of UJs, providing significantly more proportional inclusion of UJs from underrepresented regions.

A more detailed examination of data reveals that the uneven coverage of UJs in indexing databases intersects with significant disparities in UJs production itself. In each region, a small number of countries are responsible for the majority of UJs: Brazil's community-supported publishing system in Latin America (Kulczycki et al., 2025), Indonesia's accreditation-driven journal expansion in East Asia (Putera et al., 2021), Iran in the Middle East, India and Pakistan in South Asia, and Nigeria and South Africa in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, comparatively low numbers of UJs in some high-income countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, or Finland, often reflects alternative models of scholarly communication rather than weaker publishing systems. This concentration also shapes regional indexing patterns: in regions where UJ output is dominated by countries with low Scopus and WoS inclusion rates (e.g. Indonesia or Brazil) overall regional coverage is substantially depressed, whereas regions where output is concentrated in countries with high relative indexation, such as Estonia or Croatia, display artificially inflated regional averages.

Grouping countries *by income level* highlights similar patterns. Although Ulrichsweb shows that UJs are fairly evenly distributed across high-income and upper-middle-income countries, this parity is not reflected in WoS or Scopus coverage, where UJs from high-income countries are significantly more prevalent. WoS's core indexes are especially skewed with over 90% of UJs originate from high-income countries. Inclusive platforms, in contrast, tend to reflect the full spectrum of publishing activity across income groups.

Looking at coverage relative to each group's total output reveals a structural gradient: the lower the income level of countries, the smaller the share of their UJs that are included in Scopus and WoS. These differences are intertwined with broader disparities in national research and higher-education systems: in settings where universities operate with fewer resources or under more volatile policy environments, UJs may be well-established scholarly venues yet lack the structural capacity to meet the organisational expectations that facilitate inclusion in selective indexes.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that global inequalities in the indexing of UJs cannot be fully understood without considering the diverse trajectories of university publishing itself. While inclusive databases offer broader visibility to UJs from underrepresented regions, the structural imbalances in where and how such journals are created remain a critical, and often overlooked, dimension of global scholarly communication.

Temporal patterns in UJs publishing

Ulrichsweb metadata show that, although UJs have existed since the 18th-century, most titles in the dataset were launched in the last three decades, reflecting broader shifts in scholarly publishing. While the data alone cannot reveal causality, several contextual factors help explain this trend.

The strong rise after 2000 can be linked to historical dynamics: the displacement of universities from publishing infrastructures after 1945 (Fyfe et al., 2017) and their later efforts to reclaim a role in knowledge dissemination. This confirms that the current UJs boom resonates with the Humboldtian tradition of universities as publishers, reconfigured in the digital and OA era. In the early 2000s, open-source journal management systems, most notably Open Journal Systems, lowered the technical and financial barriers to launching and maintaining journals. These tools allowed universities, even those without specialized infrastructure, to take direct control of journal production and dissemination. At the same time, many countries began reforming their research evaluation and funding systems, introducing performance-based criteria, journal ranking or OA mandates, which may have

encouraged universities to formalize existing journals or launch new ones in response to changing incentives.

Regional differences in growth trajectories may indicate the influence of local publishing cultures, funding conditions and infrastructure. For example, the sharp rise in UJ creation in Europe, East Asia and the Middle East during the 2000s may relate to digitalization strategies and national science policies. In contrast, the more gradual and sustained growth in Latin America aligns with long-standing traditions of public, non-commercial academic publishing, supported by cooperative infrastructures such as SciELO and Redalyc. The relatively recent but rapid increase in Sub-Saharan Africa may suggest growing engagement in institutional publishing supported by international funding and capacity-building efforts.

The apparent decline in newly established UJs after 2020 should be interpreted with caution. While delays in registration likely explain some of the drop, other factors may include resource constraints, efforts to consolidate existing journals, or a possible saturation after earlier periods of rapid expansion.

Linguistic barriers and the gatekeeping of English

The results on language use among UJs show a clear misalignment between the linguistic diversity of university-based publishing and the language preferences of major indexing systems. Only around one-third of the UJs in the dataset are published exclusively in English, while most use multilingual or single non-English formats. Despite this, English remains a near-universal requirement for indexability in selective citation databases, contributing to the systematic exclusion of large segments of university-based publishing from global visibility frameworks.

The dominance of English is especially pronounced in the WoS Core Collection (SCIE, SSCI, and AHCI), with other 80% of the UJs publish only in English, illustrating a strong monolingual bias. Slightly more linguistic diversity is observed in ESCI and Scopus, yet English still clearly prevails.

In contrast, OpenAlex and DOAJ exhibit a markedly more diverse linguistic profile. In both indexes, fewer than one-third of journals publish solely in English, “other languages” are substantially represented, which are nearly absent in the core WoS indexes. This reflects the more inclusive and open indexing coverage of these databases, which accommodate a broader range of scholarly communication practices, particularly those from non-Anglophone regions.

An interesting trend across all indexes is the relative prominence of “multilingual with English” UJs compared to multilingual without English UJs. This suggests that the inclusion of English, either partially or in parallel with other languages, serves as a crucial gateway to visibility in global indexing systems.

The regional patterns highlight broader academic publishing traditions and the priorities of national research systems. In North America, where English is the default academic language, English-only publishing strongly dominates. In South Asia, English is also widely used, yet local UJs remain largely absent from major indexes. By contrast, Latin America and Europe exhibit greater linguistic pluralism, while the Middle East and North Africa is the only region with a substantial presence of multilingual UJs without English, suggesting a regionally specific publishing pattern.

Because UJs primarily serve national or regional academic audiences, as discussed in the Introduction, publishing in national or multiple languages is a logical and purpose-driven decision. However, indexing systems do not account for this diversity and instead

reward alignment with international English-language publishing standards, disadvantaging journals that are more deeply rooted in local academic cultures.

The implications are not merely technical. Since indexation in WoS and Scopus is often tied to research assessment, funding and institutional prestige, language becomes a mechanism of exclusion. UJs that publish in non-English languages face structural disadvantages, regardless of their academic value. Consequently, a significant proportion of global scholarly output, particularly that rooted in non-Anglophone contexts and led by universities, remains invisible within the infrastructures that determine academic legitimacy.

The centrality of SSH and the disciplinary imbalance

The disciplinary profile of UJs shows a clear dominance of the SSH. This pattern recurs across both inclusive and selective bibliographic indexes. Even in commercial databases, typically viewed as STEM-focused, SSH remains the most represented disciplinary group among indexed UJs. This aligns with previous studies and with the arguments in the Introduction that UJs support underrepresented or locally oriented fields, particularly in SSH. In particular, country-level analyses of journals in Spain, Finland, and Norway have demonstrated the predominance of SSH publishing and its limited visibility in selective citation indexes (Sanz-Casado et al., 2021).

Several factors contribute to this disciplinary concentration. SSH research tends to be more nationally embedded, often published in local languages, and oriented toward context-specific knowledge production – all of which align with the non-commercial, mission-driven logic of UJs. By contrast, medical, technical, and natural sciences are more integrated into international publishing circuits dominated by large commercial publishers.

Within the WoS Core Collection, the strong SSH presence is concentrated mainly in ESCI, while the selective SCIE, SSCI and AHCI include only a small number of UJs across all disciplines. This reflects the limited permeability of these sub-indexes for university published journals rather than the actual disciplinary distribution of UJs. In Scopus, the distribution is more balanced, yet SSH remains the largest group. Similar patterns are found in OpenAlex and DOAJ, with STEM-related UJs forming only a minor share. Multidisciplinary journals appear across platforms but constitute a relatively modest portion of UJs.

Overall, these findings confirm the centrality of SSH in institutional publishing and highlight a disciplinary imbalance: SSH dominates in volume but remains under-recognized in evaluation systems driven by STEM-centred metrics and indexing policies.

Regional patterns reinforce this disciplinary imbalance while also revealing important variations. SSH dominates the UJ landscape in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and Central Asia, suggesting a strong institutional investment in context-specific scholarship. By contrast, the Middle East and North Africa, as well as South and East Asia, show larger shares of UJs in technical and applied fields. These differences likely reflect variations in national research priorities, institutional publishing traditions, and the extent to which UJs serve as vehicles for SSH versus technical research dissemination. The regional diversification of disciplinary profiles thus underscores the importance of considering both structural and contextual factors when analyzing the global role of university publishing.

Open access and APC models

The assessment of OA among UJs is limited by the lack of a comprehensive, standardized global database on the OA status of all scholarly journals. Existing sources provide only partial coverage: Ulrichsweb contains most UJs, but its OA labelling is incomplete while DOAJ provides reliable information on OA status and APC models, but only for journals that have applied and been selected for inclusion. Consequently, a full global picture of OA practices among UJs remains out of reach.

However, based on the limited evidence available, our results align with earlier studies that emphasized the strong orientation of university publishing towards non-commercial OA models (Crawford, 2025; Solomon, 2013). The majority of UJs indexed in DOAJ do not charge APCs, confirming their structural alignment with Diamond OA. This reinforces calls from international OA policy frameworks (e.g. UNESCO (n.d.), cOAlition S (2022)) to support non-APC publishing models, where UJs are already the main actors.

Not all UJs, however, follow OA pathways. Many may operate under subscription-based, hybrid or delayed OA models, although the exact scale is unclear. Moreover, earlier empirical work on small scholar-led journals has shown that even those adopting OA frequently struggle with sustainability due to limited funding and reliance on volunteer labor (Morrison, 2016). Understanding how such models persist and the challenges that UJs face in different national or institutional contexts remains an open research question. Comparative studies of how long-standing issues manifest themselves in different countries would be valuable, as they could clarify structural barriers and highlight effective strategies for achieving sustainable OA.

Without systematic recognition of the role of UJs and without more reliable infrastructures for documenting their practices, their full value in the OA ecosystem will remain under-acknowledged.

Conclusions

This study is the most comprehensive investigation of UJs to date, providing a mapping and profiling of 19,414 journals around the world. Being a highly heterogenous and distributed population, UJs are largely lacking centralized representation and advancement of common interests on the global arena, however, that does not diminish their substantial role in the scholarly publishing landscape as one of the largest publisher groups.

Their strong concentration in a handful of countries, dominance in the social sciences and humanities, and reliance on non-English languages reveal how UJs sustain bibliodiversity and provide publishing opportunities in contexts often neglected by commercial systems. At the same time, limited representation in Scopus and WoS reinforces global inequalities, obscuring the majority of this output from evaluation and recognition mechanisms.

The implications are twofold. First, UJs play an essential role in supporting locally embedded, open, and non-commercial models of knowledge dissemination. Their predominance in Diamond OA shows that universities already operationalize many of the principles currently promoted in international policy agendas. Second, the uneven visibility of UJs highlights a structural blind spot in global research assessment: unless more inclusive infrastructures like DOAJ and OpenAlex are more widely recognized and further improved

in terms of comprehensiveness in coverage and metadata reliability, large parts of scholarly production will remain invisible even if a move is made away from using WoS and Scopus.

In summary, university journals represent a vast but undervalued publishing sector whose global recognition is essential for achieving a more inclusive and equitable scholarly communication system.

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Declarations

Competing interests The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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